

*Illinois members will support district's decision to seek permission to use funds for school relocation* [WASHINGTON, D.C.] -Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Congresswoman Debbie Halvorson (D-IL) today announced that Ottawa Elementary School District #141 has won their appeal of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)'s original repair estimate for Ottawa Central Elementary School. FEMA indicated that federal funds could be used to relocate the school pending the approval of a project request submitted by the school. Durbin and Halvorson support the Ottawa School District's decision today to seek permission from FEMA use federal funding to relocate the school outside of the floodplain.

"Today's decision means a new school and a new start for the nearly 400 students that attend Ottawa Central Elementary School," said Durbin. "Relocating the school outside the floodplain is the best way to provide a safe, stable environment for learning. Congresswoman Halvorson, Superintendent Doster and I will continue working closely with FEMA to make sure they understand the urgency and importance of this effort."

"This is a huge step forward for the community. It's very important that we construct a safe, permanent building for the kids of Ottawa Central. Superintendent Doster has worked hard to make this happen, and Senator Durbin and I remain committed to supporting Ottawa and working with FEMA to resolve this issue as quickly as possible. This process can be complex and lengthy, but this is absolutely a step in the right direction," said Halvorson.

After assessing the damage from severe flooding in September of last year, FEMA released a repair estimate for the school of just under \$2 million. Citing a pattern of damage due to flooding, Durbin and Halvorson supported an appeal of this estimate by Ottawa Elementary School District. In a letter to the agency, the Illinois members asked the FEMA Administrator, Craig Fugate, to reevaluate the amount estimated for repairs and work with the school district to relocate the building.

According to FEMA, the school district is now eligible to seek approval to use the new funding towards relocation of the school. There is wide agreement throughout the community that re-building the school in the same location in the floodplain no longer makes sense and the only

long-term solution is a new permanent structure outside the floodplain.

"The kids of Ottawa Central Elementary School deserve a safe, permanent school. Building a new school outside of the flood plain is a necessity, and I remain committed to securing as much in federal funding that is available to achieve that," said Halvorson.

Halvorson also testified in front of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security and had language placed in 2010 Homeland Security Appropriations Bill report to encourage FEMA to move forward with the appeal and decision process faster than FEMA's normal response time.